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AUTHOR Maas, John M.
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ABSTRACT

Suburban school districts located immediately adjacent to large cities are now facing some of the same problems that larger urban centers have been facing for a long time. Although their problems are similar, there is little cooperation between urban and suburban districts. The critical areas blocking working relationships can be identified in three groupings: social equity problems, governance and local control, and lack of problem identification. The steps being taken to meet these problems are mostly informal and voluntary. There are, however, mutual grounds on which to cooperate: most superintendents agree that social equity is a common responsibility; both urban and suburban leaders want a good quality of life for their community; and, most urban and suburban superintendents can agree on the finances necessary to achieve these goals, although they often don't agree on who should receive them. Metropolitanwide planning in which there is compulsory participation by all education units would be a giant step toward creating an understanding of common problems, better anticipating the effects or impacts of mutual problems, and developing alternatives for achieving desired goals. (Author/IRT)

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BETTER URBAN - SUBURBAN RELATIONSHIPS

Presented by John M. Maas 1975 AASA Convention Dallas, TX

Ladies and gentlemen, the opportunity to address you on this topic represents a challenge because it means analyzing issues which are and will continue to be the challenge and focus for superintendents, school boards, parents, teachers, and students in the final quarter of this century. It will, in my opinion, take that long t· overcome some of the major, critical, social, and economic issues involved in urban-suburban relationships in metropolitan areas.

The metropolitan phenomena and the urban-suburban relationship is essentially a post World War II phenomena brought about by expanding population, economic expansion and central (major) city decline. This phenomena, in terms of public schools, reached its apex in 1965 to 1968 during the long, not summers of riots. As you will recall, the problems of the inner city which had been identified by the Kennedy and Johnson administration and treated under Title I, Housing and Urban Development Programs, and increased public welfare, exploded in the face of the American public. The suburban school district and its supporting community which had enjoyed the growth of the school district found itself faced with signs of declining enrollment, a public sentiment which was less supportive of education and very negative about the increasing local property tax base. At the same time, social equity was becoming a greater concern and interest in the courts and there was a ripple effect of the problems that

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once fell almost exclusively in the inner city. The suburban school district located immediately adjacent to the large city is faced today with some of the same problems today as that of the larger urban centers in the period 1965-68.

One would expect that faced with certain similarities in problems there would be increasing cooperation, communication, and interaction among suburban and their central or large city counterparts. This is not the case in many metropolitan areas as suburban superintendents view the problems.* (There are some exceptions which will be touched on later.)

As one superintendent described it, "The two types of superintendents tend to stand off from each other." Another stated that the "large cities tend to have their superintendent's group and we have ours." Thus, one of the immediate and critical points is that at the highest administrative leadership level there is, in many cases, no formal or informal mechanism for bringing superintendents together for any amount of sustained communication on the urban-suburban relationship. Obviously, however, one cannot hope to make progress in defining urban-suburban relationships without defining the issues confronting the two groups. The effect of the Serrano decision and Brown -vs- Topeka is very present in opinions expressed about critical issues blocking urban and suburban working relationships. A number of these concerns are:

* Survey of fifty suburban superintendents across the United States.

a) Integration including cross-bussing

b) The overburden of urban-suburban administrators which leaves little time for interaction among superintendents.

c) Competition for dollar resources from state legislatures.

d) Inability to define mutual problems

e) The dollar equalization thrust which appears to take programs away from suburban districts and shift them to the urban district.

f) The issue of governance and local control cooperative relationships are to be entered for school programs.

g) The urban district as a self-sustaining unit which generates self-contained resources and thus autonomy.

h) Policies of urban districts which create ripple effects into suburban districts and about which suburban superintendents receive no advance communication or consultation.

i) Divergent problems and interests between the two types of school districts.

The preceding illustrates a cross-section of the problems blocking working relationships between suburban and urban school districts. There was no attempt to prioritize them in presenting them to you. In reviewing the critical areas, however, there is a set of readily identifiable groupings which emerge.

I. Social Equity Problems
   A. Integration
   B. Competition for dollar resources and equalization of expenditure

II. Governance and Local Control
   A. Autonomy of large districts
   B. Cooperation by suburban districts which may lead to subversion certain local districts.

III. Lack of a Problem Identification Mechanism
   A. Personal overburden of administrators
   B. Divergent view of problems and interests
   C. Lack of communication on the effect of policies
   D. Personalities or attitudes of the individuals involved in the process

It is interesting to note that with the possible exception of integration, one might hypothesize that these same problems might split suburban-rural superintendents from one another, also. However, in order to be fair in describing the urban-suburban relationship, one must not only deal with the problems identified; but the processes either formal or informal that are being pursued for the establishment of urban-suburban relationships. Examples of these are as follows:

a) Informal summer exchanges between city and suburb in which suburban high school students work in urban settings, urban students visit suburban areas, summer scholarship programs sponsored by suburban citizens for urban students.

b) Informal contacts by superintendents at luncheons, organizations, meetings, etc.

c) Formal meetings through local associations of superintendents, school-study councils, school board associations, etc.

d) Cooperative or intermediate units which encompass both urban and suburban school districts.

e) Cooperation of school districts urban-suburban on innovative and voluntary programs.

The majority of the mechanisms identified for facilitating urban-suburban relationships in metropolitan areas are primarily informal and voluntary. None of the mechanisms serves to deal with the three major areas of social equity, governance, and local control, and problem identification except in a bandaid fashion. At best, bandaid solutions and relationships disintergrate in the face of local crises. These seem to abound in every school district across the country.

As one superintendent replied in a rather pithy manner, "hope (you) can stress the importance of sharing the same noose. In that way death might be delayed, if not prevented." This metropolitan problem and comparable phenomena is not new and has been dealt with on previous occasions by persons in the field of educational administration. Let me summarize in a brief fashion what has been said in a volume that needs to be brought to a person's attention for review, if not rereading.

In 1968 the 67th Yearbook of the National Society for the study of Education - Part I, was entitled Metropolitanism - Its Challenge to Education. Robert J. Havighurst chaired the Society's committee on Metropolitanism. Vern Cunningham in that Yearbook dealt with "Issues in Metropolitan Education Government Reform". He dealt with four of the 'most sensitive issues".

1. The Haves and the Have Nots

   The issue of inequality deserves widespread study in each of our SMSA's. It is unlikely that the courts will act soon because of the many implications involved. Thus, the resolution of present inequities will rest with lay and professional educational leaders who can work at improving existing relationships.

2. The Finance Issue

   Closely linked to the equality issue is the general issue of finance. Locating resources for govermental purposes is a plague on all public enterprises. Steps should be taken to design fully the fiscal features of structrual change, to comprehend the impact of such alterations on established units, and to anticipate the fiscal vitality of proposed new structures in terms of meeting consumer demand for educational services.

3. Centralization-Decentralization Issue

   A Strong arguement arises from the belief that schools have drifted away from the people and that the schools' point of decision need to be brought closer to the schools' constituencies.

4. The Metropolitan "Autonomy" Issue

   The same pressures for decentralization that exist within the metropolitan environment are present, to some extent at least, within the states. Where state governments have been unable to keep pace with burgeoning metropolitan problems, forces are being activated which are leading toward wider separation of SMSA's from state governments.

I bring these to you to indicate that the problems which are continuing and developing in suburban-urban relationships within the SMSA have been given some preliminary analysis. However, like most problems, there are few mechanisms for solving problems that have been tried and there are always others that "are being developed." However, it is my contention that there are more areas of common interest than are generally acknowledged among superintendents in the urban-suburban setting.

1. The area of social equity is one which superintendents agree by and large is a common responsibility.
2. Both urban and suburban leadership want a good quality of life for their community including a high level of quality education.
3. Most urban-suburban superintendents can agree on the finances necessary to achieve these goals. (However, they often don't agree on who should receive them.)

Where the breakdown occurs is in the legislative process where each group seeks its own dollar end with little attention to the needs of the whole. One could suggest that metropolitan-wide planning in which there is compulsory participation by

education units in the SMSA would be a giant step toward the understanding of commor problems, a better anticipation of the effects or impact on all districts and a plan with alternatives developed for achieving the results desired.